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A COLLECTION OF GERMANIC ANTIQUITIES

A COLLECTION of the greatest importance to the student of art as a connecting link between the classical and the medieval periods has recently been lent by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan. This is a collection of Germanic antiquities consisting of six hundred and seventy pieces, covering the period from the end of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Carolingian era (fourth to eighth century), and illustrating with a variety of material the culture and vigorous art of this long distant age. The collection has been placed on exhibition in the north end of the central hall of Addition F and in the adjoining corridor of Early Christian and Romanesque Art, in compliance with the plan previously outlined for the chronological arrangement of material in the new wing of Decorative Art. An illustrated catalogue of the collection in two volumes has been published by Seymour di Ricci, and copies of this will be found attached to the temporary cases in which the objects are at present shown. To permit easy reference to the descriptive text the arrangement of the collection follows, with few exceptions, that of the plates in this catalogue.

The collection is in two parts. Of these one consists chiefly of objects found in tombs and collected at different places in the north and the south of France by Stanislas Baron. Belonging for the most part to the period of the Merovingian kings, with the exception of some late Roman pieces imported into France, this material has been catalogued by di Ricci under the title of Merovingian Antiquities. The provenance of the objects making up the other half of the collection can be located more exactly, as it comprises the contents of tombs in one cemetery found in Niederbreisig, a small village between Coblenz and Bonn, and collected by a German antiquary, Queckenberg. The contents of each tomb have been kept together and not less than twenty-five tombs have given their tribute to the collection, to which have been added other objects in glass and

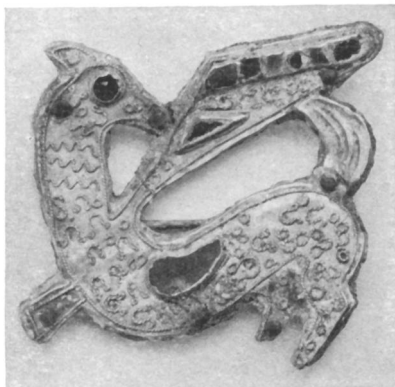
some examples of armor. The volume of the catalogue describing this part of the collection has been given the title of Germanic Antiquities.

The designations Merovingian and Germanic in the division of the catalogue as mentioned above are somewhat misleading, as the impression may be given that each part of the collection represents a distinctly national art. If comparison is made between the two collections, it will easily be seen that exactly the same style is illustrated in both, and that some of the contents of the German tombs are identical with pieces which might have been found in a very distant part of France. This style was by no means confined to central Europe. Objects of similar workmanship have been found, not only in France and Germany, but also in Russia, Hungary, Northern Italy, Spain, Scandinavia, and, with slight variations, in England and Ireland. It is the art of the Teutonic races which overflowed Europe and disrupted the Roman Empire—the art of the different tribes of the Ostrogoths and West Goths, the Longobards, Vandals, Burgundians, etc., who, belonging originally to the same race, developed their art and carried it into different countries during the *Völkerwanderung*, or period of tribal migrations. Indeed, it seems that the height of their art was reached during this great movement in Europe and that it deteriorated after they had settled. This may be said at least of the finer objects of the goldsmith's art as represented in the contents of the so-called "Military Tomb" of Vermand, which may be placed in the second half of the fourth century, and of some of the material in the Queckenberg Collection from the earlier tombs at Niederbreisig, which must belong to about the same period, judging from coins of the sons of Constantine and Domitian found in the burials.

The decorative art of these Germanic races in all its variety of expression and technique is well represented in Mr. Morgan's collection. There are, in the first place, a great number of fibulæ, showing the different types in the shape of the letters S and T, in metal, gilt or silvered, or in bronze with geometrical incised ornaments;

and a third type, circular shaped, usually in gilt and decorated with stones, verronerie cloisonné, or applied ornaments of twisted silver wire. Three or four of these fibulae are especially remarkable for their unusually beautiful shapes, representing dragons or birds in an archaically conventionalized style. A second class of orna-

While the Romans in the best period of the jeweler's art preferred the use of silver, as it allows a more plastic treatment of the decoration than other metals, the young northern races favored the more sumptuous and brilliant effect of gold ornaments. We find also in contrast to the Romans a preference for flat pictorial ornaments instead of



FIBULAE OF GILT BRONZE ORNAMENTED WITH RED AND BLUE PASTE.
GERMANIC, FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES

ments consists of belt buckles, usually of iron coated with silver and decorated with incised interlacings in black niello. In connection with these must be mentioned the curious chatelaine plaques or open-work bronze disks originally attached to the belts worn by women, and supporting by metal or leather chains their scissors or keys. Of more artistic value are the earrings, finger rings, and parts of necklaces in precious metal, which, on the whole, differ only slightly from the late Roman works, although the gold pendants in the shape of eagles show a larger and bolder design characteristic of the real Germanic style. The parts of armor show comparatively little ornament, but express, nevertheless, in their simplicity and use of straight lines the virility and strength of these barbaric artists. This vigorous quality contrasts strongly with the love of glittering gold and brightly colored stones shown in their ornaments worn in times of peace, a pleasure in gorgeous effects common to all simple people.

the plastic relief style of the classical periods. Partly from this reason some scholars have believed that the arts of the earliest Middle Ages are derived from the Orient, the home of all great lineal and flat decoration; and, indeed, there may be found in this collection fibulae in the shape of birds and dragons that show a marked relationship to Persian, as well as to Egyptian Art. What is even more important, the decoration, which is especially characteristic of this Germanic ornament, of inlaid glass paste and verronerie cloisonné, was invented in the Orient and used especially in the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire. On the other hand, the relations between this Germanic national art and the late Roman are obvious. All the lineal designs which have been considered as typically northern have also been found in Roman work, especially in the decoration of ornaments made by Roman workmen in the provinces, showing the familiar interlaced patterns, rosettes, and superimposed equilateral triangles, as well as the special technique of

the angular incision. From this it is evident that the question of the character and origin of early Germanic art is still very much involved. According to such scholars as Lasteyrie, Lindenschmit and Haupt, the style was originally invented by the northern barbaric races; others, especially Alois Riegl, have tried to prove that this art is only a development of a late Roman industry and that most, if not all of the material, is due to Roman workmen who carried their art with them to the newly founded empires in the north. A third scholar advances the claim that Oriental and Byzantine art are the decisive influences in the development of the new style. The right explanation probably lies in a compromise of all these different views.¹ The new

¹ The best résumé on the subject has been given by O. v. Falke *Geschichte des Kunstgewerbes*, Berlin, 1910. I. Chapter VI.

European art developed under Byzantine-Oriental and late Roman influences, but, at the same time, created something independent of both. The differences which we find in it depend usually upon the varying strength of local influences, so that in certain places, Spain, for instance, Roman elements predominate, while elsewhere, as in Hungary and Russia, the Oriental influence is more marked. The attempt, however, to localize the different styles is enormously complicated by the mingling of various art influences in Europe at this time, as a study of the material in Mr. Morgan's collection, known to have come from different sources, will show. At the same time it is evident that this Germanic art is not merely the imitation of classical and Oriental types, but a fusion, constituting in itself a brilliant and original creation.

W. R. V.

